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Voluntary Public Schools.

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I N Ontario we have established a system of Public Schools which not only receives very general support throughout the Province, but also favorable comment elsewhere. However, much as we may admire the system, no one can say that it is perfect. Many, in fact, are much dissatisfied with the practical results. Some go further, and criticise it severely as being so mechanical as to deprive its work of all individuality of character. At the last meeting of the Ontario Educational Association, a paper was read by Professor Robertson, of Victoria College, in which he termed the system a "fetich," and expressed little, if any, hope of improvement under present conditions. No doubt one reason why the Ontario Public School system has been so popular is because it seemed to fit in with the democratic demands of the day, and satisfy the hope that our common schools will become the sole instrument for educating Canadian citizens. But in confining the work of the system to the limited sphere of the common school, surely some injury is done to the educational work of the Province. It is impossible, under such mechanical conditions, to attempt to provide a liberal education; and for this reason many of the wealthy class of citizens educate their children in *private* schools, *separated* from the Public School

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system: leaving all other classes to utilize our common schools as the only means of obtaining an education for their children.

At present the parent is completely ignored in the management of our Public Schools, controlled as they are by a Board of Trustees elected by popular vote. Opportunity is thus given to the influence of all the worst features of "ward heeling" and politics. The parent having no voice, the voter, whether he has children or not, whether he is respectable, worthless, or even vicious, has yet his vote, which is all-powerful in the selection of the managers to advise and control the Public Schools, to which parents are then compelled to send their children, or else *separate* from the system entirely.

To overcome these defects, the proposal is made to affiliate Voluntary Schools with the Common Schools in one complete Public School system, having sufficient uniformity and yet flexible enough to meet the varying demands of different classes of the community. The healthy rivalry created by the establishment of these schools must have a beneficial effect on the whole system. One school reacts on the other in the common aim to produce the best results for the time and money expended. The fact that there are so many private elementary schools is evidence of the demand for a diversified form of education. I cannot do better than quote here the words of John Stuart Mill, which are well worth considering. He says: "That the whole or any large portion of the education of the people should be in State hands, I go as far as anyone in deprecating: all that has been said of the individuality of character and diversity in opinions and modes of conduct involves, as of the same unspeakable importance, diversity of education. An education established and controlled by the State should only exist, if it exist at all, as one among many competing experiments, carried on for the purpose of example and stimulus to keep the other up to a certain standard of excellence."

Why should we not encourage Voluntary Schools to affiliate with the State system, the condition of affiliation depending on the employment of duly qualified teachers, the use of common textbooks, and submission to the same inspection? This would secure all that the State requires, and opportunity would then be given to parents to supplement the ordinary work of the common school with such classical, scientific, commercial, religious or other instruction, as any substantial number may desire, who are willing

voluntarily to contribute the money required to support such additional instruction.

In presenting to you a scheme for the affiliation of Voluntary Schools with the Ontario School system, let me clear away two very common misconceptions in regard to it. Many assume, without I think consideration, that the scheme is simply an extension of the separate school system; while it is nothing of the sort. In fact, it is the very opposite. An affiliated school cannot be a separate school. Others are opposed to the State undertaking in any way to impart religious instruction, and make this the grounds of their opposition to the proposal; while, as a matter of fact, the State has *absolutely nothing* to do with the special instruction imparted in Voluntary Public Schools, whether it be religious or secular. The State alone is concerned in securing at least an efficient common school education for the children of all classes, and the Voluntary Public Schools simply assist in carrying on the educational work of the Provincial system. No money from the public funds will be used for supporting any special instruction imparted in a Voluntary Public School.

We have at the present time a large number of Voluntary Schools, established chiefly in the cities and larger towns, carried on as private enterprises, founded for the purpose of affording more liberal educational advantages than can be secured in the ordinary common school. These Voluntary Private Schools are now quite distinct from the State system, and anyone sending children to them thereby *separates* from the Public School system of the Province. Working under such rigid and mechanical conditions we lose in our Public Schools all opportunity of affording a liberal education and the possibility of reasonably adapting Public Schools to the needs of the various classes of the community; while with private schools many feel a lack of confidence in the efficiency of their work, which might be overcome by enforcing, or, at least, encouraging the employment of duly qualified teachers, and in requiring their work to be submitted to the same inspection as the common school. Sufficient uniformity would be maintained in the work and in the promotion of pupils which would enable the children to pass from Common Schools to Voluntary Schools, and *vice versa*, without losing their standing in their classes. The work in all schools would thus stand in better proportion, and together they would constitute one National Public School system.

I will here set out the scheme in detail, that we may have something definite to consider. It may not be perfect in arrangement, and may need some qualifications. The details can be worked out when we have agreed on general principles.

NATIONAL SCHOOL SYSTEM, RECOGNIZING VOLUNTARY SCHOOLS.

TAXATION.

1. All ratepayers to contribute to a common "*building fund*," necessary to meet the cost of providing accommodation for all Public School children not attending Voluntary Schools.

2. All ratepayers to contribute to a common "*educational fund*" necessary (with the Government grant) to meet the cost of imparting elementary secular instruction to all the children attending public schools (including Voluntary Schools).

VOLUNTARY SCHOOLS.

3. Any school conducted in a suitable building, provided at the cost of its supporters, and (a) having an average attendance of at least thirty pupils, maintaining a standard of efficiency in secular subjects; and (b) using the Public School text-books; and (c) employing as teachers only those holding Public School certificates; to be entitled, on the written application of at least twenty heads of families resident in the school district, to have such Voluntary School placed on the list of Public Schools; subject to the same inspection, and to share in such "*educational fund*" according to the average attendance as in the case of other Public Schools.

INSTRUCTION IN SPECIAL SUBJECTS.

5. In Voluntary Schools special classical, scientific, commercial, mechanical, religious or other instruction may be imparted to the pupils; provided, however, that it in no way interferes with the efficiency of the work of imparting the elementary instruction required by the State curriculum.

In regard to taxation, it will be seen that all ratepayers contribute in proportion to their means as at present. All unite in supplying common school accommodation to meet the needs of each district. No one who is satisfied with the restricted education of the common school can complain that they have not a suitable building to accommodate their children, while parents desiring a more liberal education for their children are not deprived of their right to share in the public funds expended on the maintenance of a public school education. Our municipalities would expend exactly the same amount of money, per capita, on the children attending Voluntary Public Schools as on those attending the Common Public Schools. The encouragement to parents to supplement the work of the common school must materially advance the educational work carried on under our Provincial system. The State would still secure the education of a public school—the instruction imparted by its own qualified teachers, using the same text-books, and the work submitted to the same inspection. Parents could at the same time secure the special advantages they desire, and are willing to maintain by their *voluntary* contributions to the particular school to which they may *voluntarily* choose to send their children.

In our cities and larger towns the average number of pupils in a class is so large that many feel that the teacher cannot in such cases give that personal attention to the pupils, so necessary in making their work thorough and complete. When a substantial number of parents desire to supplement the work of the common school with classical, commercial, religious or other instruction, will it not be a distinct advantage to provide a way by which this could be done in harmony with the State system? It is certainly a manifest injustice to those who wish a liberal education for their children to deprive them of all right to share in the rates levied for the support of a common school education, and to force them to separate from the national system.

On the ground of economy, the encouragement of voluntary public schools will be a distinct advantage to our municipalities. "Financially it seems to me to be the height of folly," writes the Duke of Argyle, "to discourage the greatest of all agencies—zeal for religious truth—in persuading men to support efficient voluntary schools in which they take an earnest interest." The desire to add effective religious instruction to the curriculum of a common

school will induce the members of the religious bodies to establish in the school-houses attached to their places of worship voluntary public schools affording a thoroughly efficient common school education. In allowing such schools to affiliate with the Public School system, and in making a per capita grant, "paying them for their work as tested by such methods as may be deemed best," the municipality will secure the education of the common school at simply the cost of maintenance, without being required to make any expenditure on buildings or school accommodation. When we realize that the Public School Board of Toronto is this year asking for \$165,000 in order to increase the common school accommodation in the city, we can appreciate at once the economy. If, for instance, only ten voluntary public schools were established in Toronto, each accommodating one hundred pupils, the sum of \$50,000 might be saved and deducted from this year's estimates. Of course, the buildings used must be suitable. But this can be secured by making reasonable conditions necessary before the school can be rightly affiliated, and the maintenance of such conditions being required for the continuation of such affiliation from year to year.

By the plan proposed, it will be seen that no class of citizens, no matter how poor they may be, will find school accommodation lacking; or the opportunity of obtaining the free education of a common school denied; and no class, no matter how wealthy its members may be, need separate their children from the one national system, having opportunity thereby to supplement the work of a common school with any special advantages they may require. Between these two classes comes, I suppose, the great mass of the community, demanding probably the most consideration in the question of Public School education, and as much entitled to a liberal education as the rich.

The religious bodies represent classes of citizens with a certain community of interest. Let me refer to them particularly for the purpose of making a practical example; though the scheme is equally adaptable to any scientific, commercial or other corporation representing a substantial number of citizens. Here we have a congregation worshipping at one common centre, and having buildings attached to their church suitable for school purposes. At present these buildings are unoccupied and lie idle during the school days of the week. By their use a large amount of accom-

modation would be secured without cost to the community. Should the parents sending their children to a voluntary school desire to supplement the work of a common school with any religious instruction, surely it is unreasonable for the State arbitrarily to deprive them of their right to be recognized as a part of the Public School system, and to drive them into *separate* schools, when they are ready at their own expense not only to provide the building, but also to contribute what is necessary to support the religious or other special instruction they wish to have imparted.

Another advantage to be derived from the scheme will be the enlarged scope given for the work of capable teachers. Under the present mechanical conditions, the work of a teacher is restricted to the necessarily narrow limit of the common school curriculum. The teacher with ability to impart classical, commercial, religious or other special instruction finds no opportunity under our educational system to fully employ his faculties, except to a very limited extent. No wonder the services of many of our best teachers are therefore lost. With their ability they can rightly earn more than the recompense allowed by our Public School Boards for imparting instruction in the common schools in a limited number of subjects, and consequently they seek other employment; using their position in a common school simply as a stepping-stone to other vocations. In establishing Voluntary Public Schools the teacher may have a direct financial interest in the success of the school, giving encouragement either in doing better work with smaller classes, or in imparting some special instruction which will entitle them to increased remuneration. The voluntary fees contributed by the parents would supplement the ordinary grant from the Public School rates, the amount of such voluntary fees adjusting itself to the demand and supply of each school, and probably varying according to the requirements and wealth of the supporters in different localities.

Taking the school system as we find it, it will be seen in the first place that the Board of Trustees elected by popular vote can but represent at best a general average. This Board of Trustees will naturally expend only an average amount which will satisfy the popular demands of the section. They will employ only average teachers and pay only average salaries. This condition of affairs, I take it, must be considered ideal with the present system. In practical operation I fancy our common schools, in many places,

fall far below what ought to be the average requirements of the community. On the other hand, by the affiliation of Voluntary Schools the work of the School Board must at least be maintained to its present efficiency, while opportunity is given to supplement this with all that makes up a liberal education. I need not here enter into details regarding the management of such Voluntary Public Schools. No doubt the parents establishing Voluntary Public Schools would have a controlling voice in the management; subject to the conditions laid down by the Educational Department, and satisfying the requirements of the Public School Board of the same municipality, and submitting to the same inspection. By the affiliation of Voluntary Public Schools with the Public Schools of the Province, we at once harmonize the interests of the State, the parent, and the teacher all in one National system—all combining in an effort to produce the best and most liberal educational advantages possible for all classes of the community under one Public School system.

